Executive Summary:

- Deafinitely Theatre is one of the UK’s largest employers of deaf actors
- We are part of the Arts Council’s National Portfolio and are nationally and internationally recognized
- We are a deaf-led company performing in British Sign Language (BSL), including innovative translations of Shakespeare into BSL, performed at Shakespeare’s Globe on the South Bank
- We currently employ 3 deaf staff members who require both BSL interpreter and CSW support on a regular, flexible basis to meet the weekly changes in their work tasks.
- We also support over 30 deaf actors, deaf writers, and deaf technical crew each year and help them find work with other theatre companies and work with hearing peers.
- Our deaf staff, deaf actors, and deaf crew report they find ATW inaccessible, and recent changes have placed more burden on hearing staff members in dealing with ATW issues.
- Many other theatre companies ask us for help on ATW issues when they seek to take on deaf actors or deaf crew, because they are baffled by ATW, and find the rules and procedures unclear.

We recommend:

- ATW should have all their rules online, in a clear and detailed format, including flow charts, necessary requirements etc, including in BSL.
- ATW applications made available to apply online and/or by email.
- ATW users can manage their cases and payments and invoices online.
- Deaf ATW applicants are able to apply in BSL and receive letters in BSL and respond in BSL.

The AtW application and assessment process, from the perspective of employees and employers:

1. It has been the responsibility of hearing staff to apply, manage and process ATW support because our deaf staff and employees and the deaf actors we support have all reported they find the process inaccessible to them. This therefore impacts on the work time of
hearing staff who, since the changes were introduced, has seen their
time spent resolving issues rise on average from 2 to 5 days each
month, including resubmissions of lost claims.

2. There is no route for deaf staff to apply in BSL or get responses in
BSL. With the decision to remove being able to apply by email, this
makes it even less conducive to deaf people being able to apply
themselves. Our company founder and Artistic Director, Paula Garfield,
is herself deaf and dyslexic. When she set up Deafinitely Theatre, 12
years ago in 2002, she depended on friends to translate ATW
documents and letters into BSL, and type up the responses or make
phone calls on her behalf.

3. Deaf workers in theatre tell us they face huge obstacles in gaining
access to work via ATW. Often they do not understand the application
process at all because BSL is their first language or they simply do not
understand the process. Many times they receive letters from ATW
that are incomprehensible to them. Because of the nature of theatre
work, deaf cast or crew will rarely have access to interpreters to
translate letters or make phone calls for them.

4. As a result, we often have to translate ATW letters into BSL for various
deaf cast and crew who work for us or for other companies and support
them with their responses to ATW.

5. We regularly receive calls from other theatre companies who have
taken on, or want to take on a deaf person but are baffled by the ATW
process. We support best as we can, but this is not work our staff are
paid to do.

6. In several cases, we have had to take on the entire workload of
applying for and processing ATW on behalf of other theatre companies.
This is unpaid work we do as part of our commitment to supporting
BSL in theatre.

The adequacy of ongoing support, both in terms of the aids, adaptations
and support workers provided through AtW, and the help and advice
offered by DWP:

7. Our deaf staff would not be able to function in their jobs without ATW.

8. We want to be able to use our ATW budgets more flexibly to reflect the
changing nature of business and the means that deaf staff use for
communication.

9. The publicity and information surrounding ATW for potential employers
is limited and not easily accessible. We are finding increasing number
of telephone calls to Deafinitely Theatre from external theatre
companies (such as the National Youth Theatre) wanting advice and
information on how to obtain ATW (and therefore communication
access) as well as how to contact ATW.
10. Our experience of the recent changes has been one of paperwork being lost or mislaid, ATW staff leaving without informing us, being passed between a number of people and departments to resolve issues and a lack of communication meaning we are constantly chasing unreturned calls.

11. Our deaf staff find ATW impossible to deal with by themselves, due to either not understanding the English, or finding the letters / phone calls inaccessible.

12. When our deaf staff, actors and crew seek work in normal, hearing, mainstream theatre companies, it is almost impossible for them to secure ATW support since the process and communication is inaccessible to most deaf people and hearing employers with no experience of the system do not, from our experience, understand it. This is a considerable obstacle to deaf people’s careers within the theatre world.

**Our Recommendations:**

The following would benefit us as a company and enable deaf staff to better manage their access needs to fulfill their job:

1. ATW should have all their rules online, in a clear and detailed format, including flow charts, necessary requirements etc, including in BSL.

2. ATW applications made available to apply online and/or by email.

3. ATW users can manage their cases and payments and invoices online.

4. Deaf ATW applicants are able to apply in BSL and receive letters in BSL and respond in BSL.

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